



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

### “THE SPIRIT OF ISLAM.”

THE present age is rich in books on the history of religions, and particularly in this country much is written and spoken yearly on religious subjects. I leave unmentioned the external motives which keep this literature alive and have the undeniable merit of stimulating the study of important theological and cultural questions. As a matter of course, not all these productions are of equal value, and many an amateur has been allowed to enter the ranks of scholars and to write to the best of his knowledge, but rather incompletely prepared. The investigation of the religions of ancient peoples, which is the most essential item of their culture, forms, so to say, the top of the ladder, which can only be reached by much diligent preparation and study. Philosophical or moral expositions—however interesting they may be—are less required, *e.g.*, for the understanding of the faith of Semitic nations, than acquaintance with their languages and literatures. The religious needs of the old Semitic peoples arose from considerations which were anything rather than moral, and their original form of worship is as natural a growth as the instincts of self-preservation and propagation.

The principal questions for investigation comprise the objects which were worshipped and the way in which this was done. It is obvious that the further we look back in the past the more obscure these things become. It is just in this respect that the Arabs offer a very instructive example, as they not only retained their old heathen worship up to a comparatively late period, but allowed us to observe their conversion to Monotheism.

Apart from other points of view—which are of more interest for the present time—this one is sufficient to

induce us to study this remarkable historical event. We possess many excellent works on Mohammed and Islamism, but written by European scholars. It is therefore of particular concern to take notice of a similar book from the pen of a Moslim, versed in all subjects of modern European culture, trained how to treat scientific questions critically, and who besides holds a high legal office in his native country. Syed Ameer Ali, Judge of the High Court of Judicature in Bengal, is the author of an extensive work on *The Spirit of Islām*, in which he expounds the *Life and Teachings of Mohammed* from the standpoint of a faithful believer.

The author is no novice in literary pursuits, as he published in 1872 a smaller volume containing a *Critical Examination of the Life and Teachings of Mohammed*. The present work is far beyond a second edition of the same, as it treats of all questions connected with Islamism on a broader basis, and is altogether a much riper production. The author, who is well versed in the European literature on his subject, has thus had the best opportunity of whetting his judgment on the grindstone of European criticism, and it will be one of the most interesting points of the following pages to see in what way he has accomplished this.

I.—Syed Ameer observes that his book is intended for Indian Moslims, but having been published in Europe, he trusts that it “ may prove of some practical value to those seekers of truth in the West whose minds have gone forth in quest of a positive and eclectic faith suited for the noblest . . . natures.” One would be therefore led to expect a text-book of Islamism rather than a critical examination of its origin and character. Yet it is certainly the latter which the author claims to give us in continually opposing the teachings of his faith to the institutions of Judaism and Christianity.

The book is excellently written, and from the standpoint of a Moslim forms a splendid *refutatio Judæorum et Christianorum*. It is ingenious, enthusiastic, and awakens

enthusiasm. It is sure not only to make a deep impression on a sensitive mind, but to arouse it even to fanaticism, although orthodox readers may feel repelled by the evidence of freethinking apparent in many of the views propounded. The author, being a barrister, pleads the cause of Islam most effectually against imaginary accusers. Well acquainted with the principal portions of the literature of the opponents, he understands how to show the best side of his faith, and to veil its weaker points.

It is unavoidable that the non-Moslim reader should consider the book from a different point of view; yet it should be his endeavour to judge with greater impartiality than that shown by Syed Ameer in his criticism of the Jewish and Christian religions.

The learned author gives a very lucid picture of the spiritual status in North Arabia before Islam, not only of the Arabs, but the Jews and Christians too. Neither of them, he says, had succeeded in raising the Arabs in the scale of humanity. This is simply inaccurate. Did not many Arab tribes embrace the faith of either the one or the other? These certainly displayed an intellectual superiority over their Pagan countrymen. Or can we imagine an Islamism without the help of Biblical doctrines? For a general conversion, however, both forms of religion were equally unsuitable. Christianity was unwelcome—to give only one reason—on account of the quarrels among the sects on certain dogmas, whilst the Jewish ritual and ceremonial laws were not quite compatible with the conditions of life in Arabia. The converted Arab families were not very deeply imbued with the Jewish or Christian doctrines either, as was shown in the sequel; yet they were more advanced in civilisation than those who remained heathens.

The description given by Syed Ameer of the institutions of tribal life in North Arabia is summed up in a perspicuous manner; but we miss the critical method on some points where trustworthy information could have been

obtained from other sources.<sup>1</sup> The part which the Prophet is said to have taken with regard to the Federation for the defence of the oppressed in Mecca is very legendary, and the story that he was called upon to lay the holy stone in its place at the restoration of the Ka'ba is not much better founded. But it is noteworthy that our author simply ignores the doubts already expressed by Sprenger in his biography of Mohammed.<sup>2</sup>

There is one important point in which Syed Ameer is in accordance with all modern writers on Islam, viz., with respect to the spontaneous origin of the first revelation. The difference is only this—that the latter represent Mohammed as suffering from nervous attacks or hallucinations, whilst the former endeavours to secure the reader's sympathy by maintaining that he was divinely inspired.

One night—"the night of power and excellence"—when a divine peace rests on creation, and all nature is lifted up towards its Lord—in the middle of that night the book was opened to the thirsting soul. Whilst lying, self-absorbed, he is called by a mighty voice, surging like the waves of the ocean, to cry. Twice the voice called, and twice he struggled and waived its call. But a fearful weight was laid on him, and an answer was wrung out of his heart. "Cry!" called out the voice, for the third time.

And he said, "What shall I cry?" Came the answer: "Cry—in the name of thy Lord!"<sup>3</sup> (p. 83).

If the first oracular enunciation of one of the greatest reformers that ever lived was not more than a cry due to overwrought nerves, one could not expect anything of importance to follow. Besides, if that sentence which generally—and rightly—is taken for the Prophet's inaugural address, had been quite his own, he would probably have spoken in the ordinary Arabic language. Several

<sup>1</sup> *E.g.*, the author repeats the obsolete tradition that the collection of Arabic poems styled *Moallagât*, was woven into silk and suspended over the Ka'ba; a tradition the fallacy of which has long ago been proved by Noeldeke, *Beitrag zur Kenntniss der Poesie der alten Araber*, p. 17 sq.

<sup>2</sup> *Leben und Lehre des Mohammad I.*, p. 154.

<sup>3</sup> Qor., xcvi. 1, *Iqra' bismi rabbika*.

years ago I expressed the opinion<sup>1</sup> that this oracle is nothing but the Arabic rendition of Gen. xii. 8. The more I examine them, the more I am convinced of the identity of these two verses. Not the least significant of the proofs is the linguistic one. The root *qara'a* is frequently used in the Qorān, but always followed by the accusative, whilst this is the only place where the following object is introduced by the preposition *b*; *Thy Lord* is but the translation of *Adōnay* according to the Jewish pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton. Even the Syrian version translates *waq'rā bash'mēh d'māryā*. I hope to give further evidence on another occasion. I deem this question very important on account of the conclusions to be drawn from it. The fact of the first prophetic ejaculation having been borrowed from the Bible qualifies the theory of the fiery exultation which burst its bounds in the *Iqra'*. We must distinguish two sorts of enthusiasm; the one which is but ephemeral, and rouses man for a time to extraordinary actions; and the other, deeply rooted and enduring, which gains in strength every time the subject is recalled, and does not shrink from any sacrifice. I am inclined to doubt entirely Mohammed's possession of the former when he commenced his ministration, whereas he fully proved that all his actions were swayed by the latter, for which he suffered. It is only through the continued maintenance of his high ideals that he was able to achieve a well-nigh imperishable work. His merit is not at all diminished, if we consider the first utterance of his apostleship not as a mere outburst of his long suppressed feeling, but of an idea *learnt* long ago, and well discussed in his mind. Had Mohammed even been capable of clothing his new belief in words—which is doubtful—he could not have found a more appropriate expression than the Biblical sentence which proclaimed the monotheistic idea amidst a Pagan population. Moreover, the few first revelations which

---

<sup>1</sup> *Beitraege zur Erklarung des Qorān* (Leipzig, 1886), p. 6.

followed are only variations of the same theme, although wrapped in the boldest metaphors.

Syed Ameer considers it "a noble feature in the history of the Prophet of Arabia, and one which strongly attests the sincerity of his character, the purity of his teachings, and the intensity of his faith and trust in God, that his nearest relations, his wife, his beloved cousin, and intimate friends were most thoroughly imbued with the truth of his mission, and convinced of his inspiration" (p. 89).

Rather overflowing with words, the learned Judge places Mohammed here in a contrast with Jesus, whose influence, he says, was least among his nearest relatives, and whose brothers never believed in him. The impartial historian must, however, add that this was exactly the case with Mohammed, but from this we cannot deduce anything. Mohammed had no brothers to believe or disbelieve in him. His nearest relations were his uncles, who not only did not follow his faith, but hated and persecuted him as an innovator. The "nearest relations" of Mohammed are thus limited to his wife and daughters. Others were his cousin and adopted son, Ali, who was only ten or eleven years old—and hardly old enough to form an opinion<sup>1</sup>—and his freed slave, Zeid. Besides this, we must not forget that the Northern Arabs had long since wearied of Paganism, and only upheld it from sheer conservatism, or from worldly motives.

The picture the author gives of Mohammed's uncle and protector, Abū Tālib—father of Ali—is greatly exaggerated, and it is peculiar that he does not, or will not see, that the poems in honour of the Prophet are not authentic. With the same reserve are to be received other traditions, which, for Syed Ameer, are as many historical documents. If the Meccans asked the Prophet for miracles, it was only a natural demand, as the age was

---

<sup>1</sup> The approval of Abū Tālib—who himself remained heathen—of Mohammed's mission, and which is quoted by the author with so much satisfaction from the Moslim tradition, is, of course, merely a fabrication.

not sufficiently advanced to dispense with this desire. His negative answers were weak, he tried hard to stamp some dim visions and dreams as miracles, and would have given much for a real one. A large portion of the Qoranic revelations tends to prove that new miracles were unnecessary for the following reasons: In the first place, the previous prophets had already performed many; secondly, the works of Nature were in themselves wonders, and finally, every revelation of Allah to Mohammed, especially his knowledge of the past, must be looked upon as a miracle.<sup>1</sup>

The connections which Mohammed gained with Medina, and which ended in his own migration and that of his adherents to that town, are for Syed Ameer nothing but a series of unforeseen events. He apparently attaches more weight to the legendary and romantic circumstances by which this fact was accompanied than to the deeper historical references which carried the Prophet and his cause nearer to this centre of monotheistic worship. He is not aware how well Medina in particular was prepared for conversion by the long presence of the Jews in this city. For Syed Ameer they only form "the most serious element of danger." He forgets the good service which Mohammed hoped they would render him. It is very probable that the Medinian Jews were possessed of all sorts of strange ideas regarding the man who had risen to uphold the standard of monotheism. Their position in Medina was at the time such as to revive their Messianic hopes. No one was more conscious than Mohammed how much of the revelations already published was due to Jewish teaching, and it seems to me that he himself, when he made up his mind to "cut off relations with Mecca," speculated a little upon the Messianic expectations of the Jews. How happy would he have been had he been able to realise only a shadow of these hopes! It only required his residence

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. an-Nasafi, *The Pillar of the Creed of the Sunnites* (ed. Cureton), p. 16.



among the Medinian Jews for a few weeks to bring disappointment to both sides, which Syed Ameer thus characteristically expresses: "for barely a month had gone by before the old spirit of rebellion, which had led them to crucify their prophets, found vent in open seditions and secret treachery" (p. 139).

This is quite a new version. Many of the Medinian Jews had only recently been converted from Paganism; had also these crucified their prophets? The influence and importance which the Medinian Jews lost by the entry of Mohammed is of no consideration for the author; he only sees that "no kindness or generosity on the part of the Prophet would satisfy them." Had they immediately on his arrival sworn allegiance to him? Nothing is known of any conversionist tendencies fostered by the Jews in North Arabia, certainly not towards the Christian Arabs who stood under Byzantine suzerainty. From this we may infer how much truth there is in the author's remark:

"Enraged that they could not use him as their instrument for the conversion of Arabia to Judaism, and that his belief was so much simpler than their Talmudic legends, they soon broke off, and ranged themselves on the side of the enemies of the new faith. And when asked which they preferred, idolatry or Islam, they, like many Christian controversialists, declared they preferred idolatry, with all its attendant evils, to the creed of Mohammed" (p. 142).

The prosaic historian would express the above thus: The Jews of the Hijāz were impolitic enough to show their spiritual superiority too openly, having soon found out the incompleteness of Mohammed's religious knowledge. If they reviled him, "twisted their tongues," and mispronounced the Qoranic words, they only did what he unconsciously did with Biblical words and narratives;<sup>1</sup> but

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the instances I gave, *Beitraege*, p. 63 sqq.

the tragic element in their behaviour consists in their not recognising the fact that Mohammedanism would eventually be victorious in Arabia.

It is thus not astonishing that in describing the expulsion of two of the Jewish tribes from Medina, all the right is on the side of Mohammed, whilst the expelled Jews are represented as only having met their deserts. To illustrate Syed Ameer's method I will quote his remarks with reference to the assassination of some Jewish chiefs, whose whole crime was that their influence was still dreaded by Mohammed.

"Christian controversionalists have stigmatised these executions as 'assassinations.' And because a Moslim was sent secretly to kill each of the criminals, in their prejudice against the Prophet they shut their eyes to the justice of the sentence, and the necessity of a swift and secret execution. There existed then no police court, no judicial tribunal, nor even a court-martial, to take cognizance of individual crimes. In the absence of a State executioner any individual might become the executioner of the law" (p. 162).

This argumentation does credit to the learned Judge. Can he advocate one and the same person being prosecutor and judge? Even according to the most primitive code of justice the execution of a culprit is carried out in the presence of witnesses; but if a potentate sends his fanatics into the house of an inconvenient person, to kill him whilst asleep, this is usually called murder.

Syed Ameer is a little more ceremonious in his apology for the massacre of the B. Qoreiza, where he cannot help admitting that "they alone were treated with anything like severity." The number, however, of the slain was not, as he states, two hundred, but more than six hundred.

The reader is not so much startled by the fact of this wholesale slaughter—which, in the later history of the Jews, is not an uncommon occurrence—as by the way the author tries to justify it. Mohammed remains the moral

author of this bloodshed, although not he, but Sa'd b. Obāda spoke the decree. Mohammed could easily have prevented it had he wished, but the sentence was welcome to him, although he shunned passing it.

We will not contest with Syed Ameer the titles he gives to the founder of his faith, although European students may have somewhat different ideas on the subject. Should they agree, then Mohammed was really "the grandest of figures upon whom the light of history ever shone," "a master mind of all ages," etc. The sketch of the Prophet's character given by the author is a masterpiece of rhetoric, and in many a point we fully agree with him when he says :—

"His life is the noblest record of a work nobly and faithfully performed. He infused vitality into a dormant people ; he consolidated a congeries of warring tribes into a nation inspired into action with the hope of everlasting life ; he concentrated into a focus all the fragmentary and broken lights which had ever fallen on the heart of man. Such was his work, and he performed it with an enthusiasm and fervour, which admitted no compromise, conceived no halting ; with indomitable courage which brooked no resistance, allowed no fear of consequences ; with a singleness of purpose which thought of no self" (page 212).

Unfortunately, nearly every point connected with Mohammed's life is so densely enveloped in legends that, in spite of our proximity to the age in which he lived, many important events in his career will probably ever remain a mystery.

II.—The subject of the second and principal part of the book consists of the explanation of the *Teachings of Mohammed*, which is meant to give the reader a clear insight into the *Spirit of Islām*. The author remarks in the beginning that of all great religions—including Buddhism—Islam is the only one which is not called after its founder. Syed Ameer does not say what conclusion he

wishes to be drawn from this statement, which, indeed is so vague that nothing can be inferred from it. In fact, neither Judaism nor Christianity is named after its founder. As for Islam the fact of the matter is simply this, that Mohammed fully recognised the necessity of placing his individuality in a secondary position. He always styled himself *Messenger of Allāh*, who also is the speaker of the revelations. The faith could not be called after the prophet, as he purposely allowed his name to sink into oblivion, and *Mohammed* is but an epithet adopted at a late period, and subsequently used for his cognomen.<sup>1</sup>

Syed Ameer employs the word *Islam* in its most comprehensive signification, without discriminating the historical event of the newly created faith from that which we would call now the Moslim church. Just as Islamism had to go through various stages of development before it could serve as an established church for believers of different nations and races, so the term *Islam* had to undergo an equal number of modifications, which should be taken into consideration when defining it. Syed Ameer's translation of *Islam* by *striving after righteousness* is entirely in accordance with his whole attitude to the faith; it would neither satisfy the orthodox Moslim, nor the non-Moslim historian, but is a very free rendering of the *resignation* to Allāh. Resignation, in fact, is the most essential element of Islam; the abandonment of long-cherished relations, habits, and enjoyments was the principal condition for conversion.

It is further doubtful whether a faithful Mussulman will be satisfied with the following creed put up by Syed Ameer:—

“The principal bases on which the Islamic system is founded are: (1.) A belief in the unity, immateriality, power,

---

<sup>1</sup> *Beitraege*, p. 66 *sqq.* Cf. the article just published by the Pfarrer G. Rösch in *Z.D.M.G.*, xlv., p. 432 *sqq.* The terms *Mosaism*, as well as *Mohammedanism*, are both of modern origin, and not historical.

mercy, and supreme love of the Creator ; (2.) charity and brotherhood among mankind ; (3.) subjugation of the passions ; (4.) the outpouring of a grateful heart to the Giver of all good ; and (5.) accountability for human actions in another existence " (p. 226).

This is a very beautiful Theism indeed, but no Islām. For, first of all, there is no mention of Mohammed's messengership ; or does the author wish this to be taken for granted ? If so, he should have at least intimated that. The belief in the Prophet's mission is not more or less than a dogma, for the Qorān says :—" O ye believers, fear Allāh and believe in his messenger . . ." (57, 28).<sup>1</sup> If Mohammed had preached Islam on the basis of the above abstract ideas alone—pre-supposed his ability to do so—he would not have won a single follower.

Notwithstanding this, Syed Ameer places this Islam in contradistinction to Judaism and Christianity, and even above them ; the former because of its " anthropomorphism," and because the Jews never " thoroughly abandoned the worship of the Teraphim "—the latter because of the dogma of the Trinity. But surely Judaism and Christianity are built upon the very same ethical principles which the author makes the basis of Islam, and thus we should have no difference between all three. His aggressive attitude is therefore little justified. If Mohammed had preached nothing but these doctrines he would not have brought anything that was new to the world, still less would he have had any right to call Jews and Christians unbelievers. Consequently there must have been something he deemed essential, and wished to impart to both. This it is perhaps which the learned Syed means when he says Mohammed

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. iv., 135. 169, etc. Mohammed is also called *Seal of the Prophets* in a verse (Qor. xxxiii., 40) the authenticity of which is doubtful to me (*Beitr.* p. 71). At any rate it is a sin to expect another prophet after Mohammed. Cf. *an-Nasafi*, l.c., and *as-Schahrastānī* transl., by Haabrick, p. 37. To the same category belong daily prayer, fasting in the month Ramadhān, and pilgrimage to Mecca, which the author only regards as a means of preserving " a true religious spirit " (p. 256).

addressed the "followers of degraded Christianity and Judaism . . . and made them all blush at the monstrousness of their beliefs." No one who has any notion of the way in which Islam was founded will overrate Mohammed's acquaintance with the tenets of Judaism or Christianity, because he could only form an opinion of them from observing their followers—and these not by any means the most erudite or representative—and not from the study of their Scriptures. And Syed Ameer so closely follows the Prophet's footsteps, that he is not aware that in his several pages of quotations from the Qorān to show the superiority of Islam, he principally quotes the Bible or Jewish writings.

"The ethical code of Islam is thus summarised in the fourth<sup>1</sup> Sura:—'Come, I will rehearse what your Lord hath enjoined on you—that ye assign not to him a partner, that ye be good to your parents, and that ye slay not your children because of poverty; for them and for you will we provide; and that ye come not near to pollutions, outward or inward; and that ye slay not a soul whom God hath forbidden, unless by right . . . and draw not nigh to the wealth of the orphan, save so as to better it . . . and when ye pronounce judgment then be just, though it be the affair of a kinsman. And God's compact fulfil ye; that is what he hath ordained to you. Verily this is my right way; follow it then'" (p. 272).

"The servants of the Merciful are they that walk upon the earth softly; and when the ignorant speak unto them, they reply, Peace! they that spend the night worshipping their Lord, prostrate, and standing, and resting; those that, when they spend, are neither profuse nor niggardly, but take a middle course: . . . those that invoke not with God any other God, and slay not a soul that God hath forbidden otherwise than by right, and commit no fornication: . . . they who bear not witness to that

---

<sup>1</sup> Qor. vi., 152 *sqq.* *fourth* is evidently a misprint for *sixth*.

which is false; and when they pass by vain sport, they pass it by with dignity: who say, 'O our Lord, grant us of our wives and children such as shall be a comfort unto us, and make us example unto the pious'—these shall be the rewarded, for that they persevered; and they shall be accosted in paradise with welcome and salutation:—For ever therein—a fair abode and resting place!"<sup>1</sup> (p. 280).

The reader will easily see that these and similar passages are but abstracts of the Decalogue,<sup>2</sup> modified according to the requirements of the Arabians. But, to do the author justice, we must admit that as he regards these orations as original, the picture represents itself to him somewhat differently, and we fully understand his enthusiasm.

It cannot be seriously asserted that Islamism has produced any new ideas concerning prayer. In not containing any ordinances respecting a ritual, the "Mosaic law" left to this form of worship an unbounded liberty, demonstrating at the same time by many examples the importance of prayer. That the passage Qor. ii. 38, refers to the phylacteries is rather a peculiar rendering.<sup>3</sup>

The Jewish prayer is, according to its essence, not at all necessarily attached to a synagogue, and can, according to the Rabbinical law, under certain circumstances, even be said on horseback. The essential part of it remains always the devotional outpouring of the soul, ever concentrating itself in the confession of the unity of God.

Syed Ameer is not quite historical when he avers that Mohammed commanded the worshippers to pray with their faces towards Mecca, "in order to keep alive in the Moslim world the memory of the birthplace of Islam." Why

<sup>1</sup> Qor. xxv. 64-7.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Beitr.*, p. 20, 38.

<sup>3</sup> The verse runs (according to the translation of the late E. H. Palmer) thus: "O ye children of Israel! remember my favours which I have favoured you with and fulfil my covenant and I will fulfil your covenant; me therefore dread! Believe in what I have revealed, verifying what ye have got, and be not the first to disbelieve in it, and do *not* barter my signs for a little price, and me do you fear."

should he have given preference to any particular spot? The author is silent concerning the fact that for a considerable period Mohammed had adopted the Jewish custom of turning the face towards Jerusalem. The arrangement of the *Qibla* towards Mecca is nothing but an adaptation of an older habit. Now, there is a vast difference between the Jews directing their prayers towards Jerusalem, which for many centuries had guarded the sanctuary which now lay in ruins, and Mohammed's similar use of the Ka'ba in Mecca, which, being of Pagan origin, should in reality have been abandoned with the idols, and was, from political motives, changed into a Moslim shrine.

Much the same could be said with regard to the ordinances of fasting, concerning which Mohammed did not evolve any new ideas.

When Syed Ameer is not engaged in controversy, but entirely moves on Islamic ground, comparing the more recent stages of the Moslim church with the primary one, he is often both interesting and instructive. He is fully alive to many malformations of Islamism of the present day, which, according to his view, are not due to the teachings of the master, but "to the notion which has fixed itself in the minds of the generality of Moslims, that the right to the exercise of private judgment ceased with the early legists, that its exercise in modern times is sinful, and that a Moslim, in order to be regarded as an orthodox follower of Mohammed, should belong to one or the other of the schools established by the schoolmen of Islam, and abandon his judgment absolutely to the interpretations of men who lived in the ninth century, and could have no conception of the necessities of the nineteenth" (p. 286).

There is, however, another feature to be considered in this matter, viz., that it contributed greatly towards the solidification of the Moslim church, and prevented its being split up into innumerable small sections. This is fully illustrated among the Jews in the Karaites, who finally



also saw the necessity of following the older authorities. The great masses require the firm leadership of an acknowledged master, but if each individual were instead to follow a path of his own, nothing but confusion would ensue. A religion of universal character cannot be put into practice without changing it into a church with the whole paraphernalia of dogmas and forms of worship. The difference of sects is, after all, not so material, as long as they agree on the fundamental ideas.

No one can endeavour to set up the status of women in Islam as an ideal one, without exposing himself to derision. Yet Syed Ameer tries to prove that Mohammed has given to woman a position higher than she had, not only among the heathenish Arabs, but among many of the surrounding peoples. "Respect for women" is "one of the essential teachings of his creed." One thing is true, and that is that he put a stop to the barbarian custom of the pagan Arabs of burying female children alive. His married life with Khadija was a very happy one, and a pattern for all believers. But after her death he was not the same man. His sexual insatiability is a very strange point in his otherwise self-controlled character, and tempted him to more than sophistical allegations. The famous adventure with the slave girl Maria in the house of one of his wives cannot be argued away, and it is hardly wise—not to use any stronger term—to brand serious scholars like Sprenger and Muir as utterers of "absolutely false and malicious" stories. That the Moslem commentators of the Qorān invented a harmless ground for the revelation by which Mohammed tried to silence the public comments cannot alter the fact. Syed Ameer's attempt to explain away Mohammed's pretence of having conferred a benefit on his adopted slave Zeid by compelling him to divorce his wife and afterwards marrying the latter himself, and which he moreover accounts as a sacrifice, is a clever piece of argumentation. Mohammed appeased public opinion by a revelation which declared it legal to marry the divorced wife of an adopted

son, contrary to the custom hitherto observed. The Prophet had more than double the number of wives which he allowed his followers to take, but it is not so much the number, but the way he proved his title to each marriage which is rather repulsive. It does not increase our belief in Syed Ameer's impartiality if he takes pains to strengthen these titles.

As to the women's social position, he is contented to sustain them with the hope of the future. The legal and social rights assured by Mohammed to the female sex do not equal those given to Jewish women in the code of Rabbinical law.<sup>1</sup> We can only say that the position of the Moslim woman is but an outcome of the whole system with all its advantages and faults.

Had Islamism not based its foundations on democratic principles, the difficulties of gaining adherents would have been considerably greater. In point of fact, next to the Prophet's wife and the persons mentioned above, it was principally people of the lower classes who formed the first Moslim community. This *égalité* was a strong allurements for the inferior population, nay a very statesmanlike institution, as it brought intelligent men to the fore, and altogether caused a thorough and effective stir of the elements. The mild legislation concerning slaves was indeed in the interest of the faith. Syed Ameer says with some satisfaction: "In Islam the slave of to-day is the grand vizier of to-morrow." True, but also the reverse is often the case. We lack the understanding for such a state, and according to our view, the condition of a slave would not be sufficient preparation for the post of a Prime Minister. Many a thing would be better in Eastern states, if the slave of to-day could *not* be the grand vizier of to-morrow.

As an additional attraction for the multitude, especially of the poorer classes, Mohammed made use of the theory of

---

<sup>1</sup> *E.g., Mishnah Kethūbhōth, Talm. B., Bāb. Mez.* 59, etc.

the future life. Even Syed Ameer, who places the Moslim form of this belief above those of the other religions, cannot help admitting that the "descriptions are realistic and in some places sensuous." Mohammed's notions of the future life are, however, not devoid of the nobler idea of a "return to Allāh," but the realisation of his blissful state was accompanied by shady resting-places, refreshing fruits, water, and black-eyed girls. What an effect must not the enticing image of perpetual fresh water, blooming meadows, and other enjoyments have had on poor camel-drivers and Bedouins, for whom water was one of the most precious gifts on earth. The punishments of the wicked, on the other hand, are pictured in equally glowing colours. Powerful means to ensure powerful effects! In so far Syed Ameer is right that in the later Suras, *i.e.*, when Mohammed had already gained a community of some magnitude, and had become riper himself, he mixed with these voluptuous rewards, heavenly peace and spiritual comfort.

From the preceding remarks the rich contents of Syed Ameer's work may be inferred. It further supplies an excellent exposition of the development of the principal sects and schools into which the Moslim world is divided. Yet a non-Moslim cannot study this erudite book without having with it another written by a European scholar and even then he must use his own discrimination. Syed Ameer pictures a somewhat ideal Islam, such as he would wish it to be; the impartial student must endeavour to describe it as it really is. To criticise the author's proposals of ecclesiastical reforms must be left to his co-religionists. Those institutions, touching social life, and consequently also affecting outsiders, are so superior in his eyes, that apparently he does not wish any alteration.

Perfectly intelligible is the author's delight with the scientific course Islam had taken, almost immediately on awakening to its own importance; and Mohammed's own merit must here be taken into account, as it was the

Qorān which set the ball in motion. But as little as this book is an entirely original creation, so little did Moslim science grow spontaneously; it had to be fertilised by Greek learning. The Arabs—and that is a sign of their remarkable abilities—were indeed for centuries the sole supporters of studies, and in some branches they attained a very high degree of proficiency. Ultimately, however, the Moslim was outrivalled by scientific Europe, and since then Islam proved incapable of keeping pace with it. With the exception of grammar and lexicography—for both of which we shall always be obliged to have recourse to the Arab works—there is no further development either in the amount of learning or in the method. There must certainly be a reason for it, but we cannot, as Syed Ameer does, make the “Berber fanaticism,” or the inhuman massacres executed by the Tartars and Uzbegs responsible for the decline of the intellectual vitality in Asia and Africa. Timur, in particular, who shed more human blood than any other ruler made his capital Samarcand a centre of learning, and his grandson Ulugh Begh was not only the greatest astronomer of his age, but one of the greatest since the Greek Hipparchus. He was also the last. For, scarcely a quarter of a century after his death, Copernicus conferred the leadership on Europe, which has retained it ever since. The reason of the scientific stagnation must lie somewhere else, probably in the fact that Arabian science was so closely blended with the Aristotelian philosophy that it decayed when the latter perished. The spirit of Islam is clearly shown in its incapacity to regain the former intellectual status. Of the scientific achievements of to-day’s Moslim world, only those are notable which are consummated under European tutorship. It is occidental education which has enabled the learned Syed Ameer to write so brilliant an apology of his faith.

H. HIRSCHFELD.